

Proposed Bill No. 173  
LCO No. 1184  
Elm City Communities Testimony  
February 3, 2015

Elm City Communities/Housing Authority of the City of New Haven (ECC/HANH) submits testimony in support of Proposed Bill No. 173. However, we hope that the policies set forth by the Housing Committee will focus on the benefits of supporting reemerging residents through a multi-agency partnership that include public housing authorities.

Roughly 1,200 individuals who are released from prison come to New Haven each year<sup>1</sup>, many of whom are New Haven residents. ECC/HANH, as a federal agency and as part of the Department of Housing and Urban Development's "Moving to Work" demonstration project, currently supports reemerging residents through its *Community Re-entry Program*. Through this program ECC/HANH has established a preference for its public housing units (a maximum of 12 units) for individuals returning to the community from prison who are engaged in community supportive services and job skills training. Residents receive case management services, which will assist them in identifying needs and coordinating referrals and services. The program has shown moderate success since 2011 but we believe that with the right community and State partnerships, this program can be much more effective in supporting reemerging residents that are on the right trajectory.

#### CONNECTICUT FRESH START

As part of an expansion to ECC/HANH's *Community Re-Entry Program* and a new layer of the City of New Haven's *Project Fresh Start*, Proposed Bill No. 173, inclusive of amended language, proposes a pilot program which would provide housing, tuition, a cost-of-living stipends, and supports to a small cohort of reemerging residents that have demonstrated an aptitude for learning and a desire to earn a four-year college degree.

Elm City Communities and the City of New Haven propose a partnership with the State of Connecticut Department of Correction and Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education in a "Connecticut Fresh Start" pilot.

Selected re-emerging residents would be provided with the following:

- *Housing*, potentially subsidized by ECC/HANH;
  - Participants include individual participants or individual participants and their families that total no more than four units. Four units, either individual or family, will be made available for the pilot for no more than four years or for the totality of time the participant needs to complete his/her four-year degree or whichever comes sooner.
  - *Housing* covers rent, utilities, and maintenance at an ECC/HANH development; it does not include housing choice voucher placements.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cfgnh.org/Learn/BoostEconomicSuccess/PrisonerReentry/tabid/805/Default.aspx>

- *Tuition* to complete a four-year degree at an approved State of Connecticut university, potentially subsidized by the Connecticut State Colleges and University Board of Regents for Higher Education (BOR);
  - *Tuition* covers tuition, books, fees, and healthcare for the individual participant. Although students that are on probation or parole qualify for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), most students that have been convicted of a drug-related offense or are subject to an involuntary civil commitment for a sexual offense rarely, if ever, receive aid.
  - All participants must complete the FAFSA; any aid that is provided through FAFSA will be attributed to his/her *tuition* expenses.
  - No funds (with exception to FAFSA aid) will be distributed to the participant.
  - All Connecticut private colleges and universities are welcomed to partner on the pilot program; such participation would be at the expense of the host-college/university and include the costs of the aforementioned *tuition* list.
- *A Cost-of-living stipend* for the participant to attend college fulltime while completing a four-year degree, potentially subsidized by the State of Connecticut; and
  - *Cost-of-living stipend* for an individual participant is \$20,000 and \$30,000 for an individual participant and his/her family. Cost-of-living covers public transportation costs, food, clothing, and other necessary expenses.
  - Funds will be administered on a biweekly basis by ECC/HANH to each individual participant.
- *Additional supports* to be determined on a case-by-case basis depending on the participant, potentially subsidized by the City of New Haven.
  - *Additional supports* generally cover mental health service providers for individual participants and individual participants and their families.
  - The City of New Haven may provide supports directly or may contract services with community based organizations such as Project MORE.

Eligible participants must demonstrate an aptitude for learning and a desire to earn a four-year college degree. Specifically, while incarcerated, eligible participants must have:

- taken one year or more of post-secondary coursework<sup>2</sup>,
- excelled academically,
- impressed upon the “Connecticut Fresh Start” selection committee a wish to complete a bachelor’s degree through application and interview, and
- demonstrated that a 4-year degree will provide the participant with the tools for a fresh start.

Selected participants would have a maximum of three (3) years to complete a four-year degree and these three years covers the pilot timeframe. While enrolled in the program, participants would have to maintain a minimum of a 3.0 average.

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<sup>2</sup> As an example, the Center for Prison Education offers college courses to incarcerated adults who apply and are accepted to the program.

## GOVERNANCE

We propose that a committee, representing the agencies partnering on this pilot and comprised of (2) ECC/HANH, (2) CT Board of Regents for Higher Education, (1) State of Connecticut Governor's Office, (1) State of Connecticut Department of Correction, and (2) City of New Haven be responsible for selecting the pilot applicants and determining participant outcomes if participants do not meet program requirements.

The committee will meet with all participants for one (1) mid-year and one (1) end-of-year review as followed by the Connecticut Board of Regents academic schedule. The committee will be responsible for tracking the progress of each participant throughout his/her completion of a four-year degree and by the end of the fourth year of the pilot program, the committee will provide a report that includes findings and recommendations that may allow the pilot program to be brought to scale statewide. The committee may vote to add additional members with a two-thirds majority vote of the committee.

## RATIONALE

When we look at effective recidivism reduction policies, research shows that employment plays a factor, particularly when earnings are above minimum wage<sup>3</sup>. Unfortunately, jobs that pay above minimum wage are typically reserved for those who have obtained post-secondary education. In New Haven, 38.2% of residents<sup>4</sup> have less than a high school degree and as a result, are earning on average \$19, 823 per year<sup>5</sup>. The average earnings for a college graduate is \$39,916 per year but only 10.6% of New Haven residents have a bachelor's degree or higher<sup>6</sup> and we infer that a disproportionate number of this 10.6% are white residents.

As a state, roughly 1 in 40 Black residents and 1 in 70 Hispanic residents are incarcerated compared to 1 in 470 white residents in Connecticut<sup>7</sup>. In fact, Connecticut is one of seven states that have a Black-to-white ratio of incarceration greater than 10 to 1<sup>8</sup> and we spent over \$929 million doing so, at an average cost of over \$50,000 per prisoner in 2012<sup>9</sup>. This is far too high a cost when we consider that nearly 80% of the men released from Connecticut prisons in 2005 were re-arrested within 5 years and 50% returned to prison on a new charge<sup>10</sup>, which is why it's to the State's benefit to find innovative solutions that support reemerging residents.

Providing supports for reemerging residents that have proven to be on a trajectory toward degree completion while incarcerated will enable second chance opportunities for residents that need and deserve it and by targeting low-risk individuals, Connecticut has the potential to model a

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<sup>3</sup> Christy Visher, Sara Debus, and Jennifer Yahner, *Employment After Prison: A Longitudinal Study of Releasees in Three States* (Washington: Urban Institute, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/09/0952000.html>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> 2,532 per 100,000 black residents are incarcerated; 1,401 per 100,000 Hispanic residents are incarcerated; 211 per 100,000 white residents are incarcerated according to [The Sentencing Project](#).

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/rd\\_stateratesofincbyraceandethnicity.pdf](http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/rd_stateratesofincbyraceandethnicity.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Vera Institute for Justice, *The Price of Prisons Connecticut: What Incarceration Costs Taxpayers* Fact Sheet, January 2012.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.cfgnh.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Public/2012\\_prison\\_population\\_forecast\\_final.pdf](http://www.cfgnh.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Public/2012_prison_population_forecast_final.pdf)

pilot for the nation. According to the College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, “research supports the conclusion that educational programs in prisons reduce recidivism.<sup>11</sup>” We conjecture that those displaying academic strength while incarcerated could easily complete a four-year degree with the right supports post-incarceration, and because individuals that show progress toward distancing themselves from crime (such as the individuals we are suggesting be included in the Connecticut Fresh Start pilot) “typically benefit more from employment programs than less motivated individuals,” we believe this pilot will be successful. Additionally, the annual financial savings of \$20,843-\$10,843 per participant to the State are staggering if one considers the potential impact on reduction to the 80% recidivism rate this pilot has for the State.

The ultimate hope for the participants in the pilot is good-paying employment. According to the Council of State Governments Justice Center, “...employment is often seen as a gateway to becoming and remaining a law-abiding and contributing member of a community. Employment also has important societal benefits, including reduced strain on social service resources, contributions to the tax base, and safer, more stable communities<sup>12</sup>” but we argue employment is more likely if the reemerging resident has a post-secondary degree and by alleviating the barriers (such as the need for stable housing, cost of education, and cost of living), we support reemerging residents as they change their lives for the better.

The Connecticut Fresh Start Pilot aims to provide a model that could be scaled statewide, and perhaps even nationwide, supporting city, state, and national efforts in reducing crime and increasing employment.

We thank the Housing Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly for hearing Proposed Bill No. 173 and we hope the Committee considers the impact such policies have for us all.

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<sup>11</sup> Spycher, Dianna M., Shkodriani, Gina M., Lee, John B. “The Other Pipeline: From Prison to Diploma.” College Board 2012. [http://advocacy.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/11b\\_4792\\_MM\\_Pipeline\\_WEB\\_120416.pdf](http://advocacy.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/11b_4792_MM_Pipeline_WEB_120416.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> [http://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Final.Reentry-and-Employment.pp\\_.pdf](http://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Final.Reentry-and-Employment.pp_.pdf)